

CHAIR'S REPORT
OF THE
SPRING WORKSHOP OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SPECIES WORKING GROUPS

Holiday Inn Hotel
Silver Spring, MD

March 16-17, 2004

John E. Graves, Ph.D.
Advisory Committee Chairman

Prepared by:
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National Marine Fisheries Service

CHAIR'S REPORT OF THE SPRING WORKSHOP OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE SPECIES WORKING GROUPS

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Summary: The Advisory Committee (AC) to the U.S. Section to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) convened its spring Species Working Group (SWG) meeting on March 16-17, 2004, at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Silver Spring, Maryland. The four Species Working Groups (Swordfish, Bluefin Tuna, Billfish, and BAYS or Bigeye, Albacore, Yellowfin, and Skipjack Tunas) are composed of AC members and Technical Advisors, as appointed by the U.S. Commissioners to ICCAT.

On March 16, the Committee discussed the 2003 ICCAT meeting results, U.S. implementation of ICCAT recommendations, 2004 SCRS research activities, and NMFS research and monitoring activities. The Committee also received an update on Commission activities and discussed administrative business. The consultation regarding identification of countries that diminish the effectiveness of ICCAT was also held.

In the afternoon, the Committee and its Technical Advisors broke into SWGs for detailed discussions. The purpose of the working group meetings was to identify management and research priorities that the Advisory Committee might wish to recommend to the U.S. Commissioners. Each SWG was asked to consider previous SWG recommendations, the status of the stocks, the effectiveness of current international conservation and management measures, research and data needs, compliance issues, and any other matters relating to U.S. goals for and responsibilities under ICCAT. The SWGs met again in the morning of March 17 to finalize their recommendations. The Convener of each SWG presented the results of the working group discussions to the Committee in open session for consideration. The Committee adopted the four SWG reports.

The agenda for the meeting is attached as Appendix 1. The list of participants is included as Appendix 2. The final reports of the SWGs are included as Appendix 3, as Attachments 1 through 4 (i.e., billfish, BAYS tunas, swordfish, and bluefin tuna, respectively).

I. Opening of Meeting

Welcome and Introductions. Advisory Committee Chairman Dr. John Graves opened the meeting on March 16, 2004. He welcomed all Committee members.

Adoption of Agenda. The agenda was adopted without changes, with the exception of the post-ICCAT 2003 presentation, which was moved to the closed session at the end of the day on March 16, 2004.

Appointment of Conveners and Rapporteurs. The Chair appointed a convener and a rapporteur for each SWG. Dr. John Mark Dean was appointed as the BAYS Working Group convener and Rebecca Shuford was appointed rapporteur. Gail Johnson was appointed as the Swordfish Working Group convener and Michael Clark was appointed rapporteur. Dr. David Secor was appointed as the Bluefin Tuna Working Group convener and Brad McHale was appointed rapporteur. Bobbie Walker served as convener of the Billfish Working Group and Diane Stephan served as rapporteur.

II. 2003 ICCAT Meeting Results

The Chair presented the accomplishments of the 2003 ICCAT meeting. The PowerPoint presentation is available from the Committee's Executive Secretary upon request.

III. U.S. Implementation of ICCAT Decisions

Dr. Christopher Rogers, Chief of the NMFS Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division, reported on the rulemakings underway to implement past ICCAT decisions. He reported that the final rule to implement the bluefin tuna quota was published during the previous year. The swordfish specifications and 250 billfish limit final rules are expected to publish in summer 2004. Two important proposed rules are expected to be published the spring of 2004 which, among other things, implement the swordfish and bigeye statistical document programs; ICCAT's most recent trade decisions; and ICCAT's negative vessel list, positive vessel list, and chartering recommendations. A copy of the handout summarizing the status on implementation of ICCAT recommendations is available from the AC's Executive Secretary.

One member asked Dr. Rogers to clarify the changes to the bluefin tuna statistical document that were recently adopted at ICCAT that require exporters to provide specific information on farmed bluefin tuna. He asked whether the new statistical document would be implemented by all ICCAT members simultaneously and whether the United States could refuse imports from countries that have compliance problems with any ICCAT-managed species. Dr. Rogers noted that the timing of the implementation of the new bluefin statistical document program would be dependent on each member's domestic implementation procedure. He also stated that the type of trade restrictive measure the member referred to could be taken under ATCA. However, the United States prefers to seek such actions multilaterally when possible, and the new trade measure adopted by ICCAT in 2003 provides a multilateral mechanism to pursue such a measure.

Another member noted that the import of Mediterranean farmed bluefin tuna has increased substantially and asked about the positive farming facility list. It was clarified that implementation of the positive farming list was also covered under the new trade rulemaking. There was some discussion on the lists themselves and it was clarified that while ICCAT is responsible for keeping the positive lists updated, Japan usually provides all the information on the negative list. The positive list is currently available on the ICCAT website and the Secretariat recently requested updates to the list.

A member expressed that the United States should push to include vessels under 24 meters length overall (LOA) on the positive list, because the 24 meter cut-off is creating a loophole for vessels operating in large pelagic fisheries sized just under 24 meters. Another member suggested that the list be changed to 18 meters LOA, as large catches of pelagics are occurring by vessels of that size in the Mediterranean.

One member expressed his concern with the recent rulemakings on sea turtle bycatch and sharks and the detrimental impact of these regulations on the already impaired longlining fishery.

IV. NMFS Research and Monitoring Activities

Dr. Rogers briefly reviewed the document produced at the AC's request on the research and monitoring activities taking place within and outside NMFS. The document contained a listing of the research being conducted under various funding mechanisms and the level of funding for the projects. Copies are available from the AC's Executive Secretary.

One member asked about the status of funding mechanisms that support large pelagic research. In response, Dr. Rogers stated that the Saltonstall-Kennedy funding was reprogrammed this year, but there were MARFIN funds available.

A member noted that while the MARFIN budget is about \$2.5 million, a large part of that is dedicated to red snapper research. Meanwhile, the Saltonstall-Kennedy grant has no funding this year. He asked that the HMS Division provide more information in their next report on research activities, such as the number of researchers involved in a particular study and the amount of time being spent on the research project. He suggested that NMFS invest more funding in research and development, considering US tuna fisheries are worth between \$240-270 million and the swordfish fishery about \$300 million.

The member expressed concern that there is unspent funding for marlin research. NMFS staff clarified that the US Congress appropriated \$2.5 million toward billfish research, but there is still uncertainty in Congress as to how that money should be spent. NMFS is developing a spending plan for Congressional approval that would have the money go to the Southeast Science Center for competitive bidding on billfish research projects.

One member described the cooperative research being conducted by the longline industry that is studying the potential use of two types of hooks designed to reduce bluefin tuna bycatch in the swordfish fishery. One straightens when a bluefin tuna is hooked and the other is a circle hook with a breakaway link. The study is also using time/depth recorders to gather information on the bycatch. Another member noted that the use of dissolvable bait was not included in the current proposal, although that research is ongoing. The problem of transferring new fishing methods that were successful in the Northeast Distant Experiment to other ocean areas was expressed.

V. 2004 SCRS Research Activities and U.S. Participation

Dr. Gerald Scott of the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) presented the schedule of ICCAT scientific meetings to be held in 2004. He announced that ICCAT's scientific committee, the SCRS, would be conducting stock assessments for bigeye tuna (June 28-July 3, 2004) and shortfin and mako sharks (June 14-18, 2004). A data preparation meeting for eastern bluefin tuna is also scheduled for June 1-4, 2004. Dr. Scott noted that two large bigeye tuna meetings were recently held and he summarized the programs from those meetings. He also mentioned the 2nd Meeting of the Working Group to Develop Integrated and Coordinated Atlantic Bluefin Tuna Management Strategies being held May 17-10, 2004. Copies of this presentation are available from the AC's Executive Secretary upon request.

A member asked what level of resources from NMFS is being directed to these activities. He noted that the HMS Division's budget is about \$3 million, but a large portion of that is redirected out of the office into other areas, including the Southeast Science Center. Dr. Scott added that the Center is supported to some extent by HMS money, but not completely.

Another member asked what, if any, outcomes from the eastern bluefin tuna data meeting are expected. Dr. Powers responded that substantial improvement in the understanding of catches might be made, but noted that many SCRS scientists do not believe that the data are accurate. He is hoping that there will be an improved understanding of the assumptions made in the catch estimates and their impact on the assessment. Another member asked about the Not Elsewhere Included, or NEI, catch in the Mediterranean and the amount of fish caught by recreational vessels. Dr. Powers responded that those catches may be discussed but are relatively minor in comparison to the commercial harvests.

VI. Consultation Regarding ATCA Identification of Countries

Erika Carlsen, International Fisheries, reported that no countries had been identified under ATCA in 2003 and that the review for 2004 was underway. The results of this review would be reported at the fall AC meeting. She noted that it is preferred to seek these actions using multilateral methods.

VII. Commission Update

Ms. Carlsen provided an update to the AC on Commission membership, noting that the Philippines had recently joined the Commission and Malta had withdrawn, in anticipation of joining the EC in May 2004. Ms. Carlsen also noted that the Commission's newly elected Executive Secretary, Driss Meski from Morocco, would take on his position at the Secretariat starting April 1, 2004.

Deirdre Warner-Kramer, Department of State, reported on recent events in the European Union (EU) with the upcoming accession of 10 member states. The Commissioners for the new EU members have been identified and are currently being paired up with current Commissioners before being placed in a position. The Commissioner for the Directorate-General of Fisheries (DG Fisheries) has been paired up with a Latvian, but the next Commissioner could either be from Finland, Cyprus, or Malta. With the change in the EU leadership, it is expected that Jorgen Holmquist, head of DG Fisheries, would stay in that role for at least a year.

Dean Swanson, International Fisheries Division, reported on a number of calls to action by global fisheries fora to Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), including ICCAT. These calls to action require, to some extent, action by RFMOs in reporting on activities related to deep sea fisheries and other issues of global concern. A copy of Dr. Swanson's presentation is available from the AC's Executive Secretary upon request.

Following Dr. Swanson's presentation, there was some discussion on the use of ecosystem-based management in fisheries. A number of members mentioned specific examples of the use of ecosystem indicators in fisheries management and further information on this topic can be obtained through the AC's Executive Secretary.

VIII. Other Open Session Business

No other open session business was discussed.

IX. Species Working Group Meetings

The conveners of each Species Working Group presented to the full Advisory Committee the preliminary recommendations of their groups. The final versions of these reports, the recommendations of which were adopted by the full Committee, are attached to this report.

X. Review of 2004 Schedule and Issues

Following the meetings of the species working groups, the AC reconvened in the closed session to be briefed on the 2004 ICCAT schedule and issues. Dr. Graves announced to the AC that after the 2003 ICCAT meeting in Dublin, the US delegation discussed possible measures to improve the preparatory

process leading up to an ICCAT meeting. He reported that, in response, the IAC would hold two meetings in the fall. The first would be held prior to the trilateral and quadrilateral meetings and would be an opportunity for the AC to provide input on the issues under position development and draft US proposals. The second meeting would occur after these meetings and would be an opportunity for the AC to revisit any outstanding issues and to respond to additional information coming from the trilateral and quadrilateral, as well as the scientific information on the stock status from the SCRS meeting.

Dr. Hogarth acknowledged concern from outside the agency on US preparations for ICCAT. In response, NMFS held a staff level retreat to discuss possible improvements for increasing US effectiveness at ICCAT. He noted that Dr. Graves also took part in this meeting. In addition to changes to the schedule, NMFS, NOAA and the Department of State discussed ways to improve our working relationships with other ICCAT members by developing joint proposals, looking at cooperative initiatives, and perhaps providing capacity building or other assistance similar to that provided to Ghana for observer coverage. He said that the changes to the schedule would hopefully allow the United States to prepare proposals for review by the AC and to share with other ICCAT members prior to the ICCAT meeting.

An AC member expressed concern that efforts to improve our relationship with other ICCAT members would translate into the United States surrendering fisheries to other ICCAT members. He stated that the United States should not be willing to give up anything relative to the current US allocations. He also stated that the United States should not be trying to improve its relationship with the EC while they are out of compliance with ICCAT's measures, and specifically noted concern about the issue of small fish and high eastern bluefin tuna catches.

Another member expressed concern with Mexico and their request for additional swordfish and bluefin tuna quota. He felt that Mexico has already been provided for. He suggested that the species working groups discuss priorities for the year ahead. Dr. Hogarth responded that he discussed this issue with Mexico during the recent bilateral meeting, but that it is still uncertain what is going to happen at the annual meeting in 2004.

Another member noted that while the EC made a number of threats relative to Ghana and the Gulf of Guinea closure, not much was said on the floor of the 2003 ICCAT meeting. He expressed his frustration with the EC reporting in 2003 that they had no catches of small bluefin tuna and left the burden of proof to those who suggest otherwise. Meanwhile, the United States reported an overage in the western bluefin tuna fishery. This is an issue of concern for many people in the United States and the member expressed hope that NMFS will take a proactive stance at the 2004 meeting. In response, Dr. Hogarth assured the committee that the data issue is not taken lightly by NMFS. He is very concerned about the landings for bluefin tuna and very much wants to improve domestic data collection.

Another member expressed his understanding that Dr. Hogarth and NMFS are aware of the data problems associated with the MRFSS, but noted that the current data collection system does not work. He said that something new and better is needed. Dr. Hogarth responded that he is not exactly sure how to fix the data problems. He stated that he is aware that money needs to be spent in a variety of areas and that he believed that actions taken 10 years ago would have improved the situation. He admitted that the MRFSS was never intended to do what it is being used for and that it is not a good measure for rare event species or quota monitoring. The member expressed his frustration that the situation has not improved and suggested that logbooks and observers be used. He said he felt that while the industry is supportive of logbooks, there is resistance from NMFS in using them to replace MRFSS. Another member concurred that fishermen feel they have been doing a good job of keeping accurate logbooks and are surprised that the data has not been used.

Dr. Sissenwine responded to the discussions on the data collection systems. He said that all of the suggestions being put forward by the AC have been discussed within NMFS, including changes to the MRFSS. He stated that it is well known that captains keep good logbooks, but that it is not always the case that good data is submitted when it is used for regulations. Problems with logbook data have occurred in the past. In response, a member noted that the attitude among fishermen has changed and that the system needs to change accordingly. He stated that the current system is not working and that NMFS should not condemn fishermen before giving the use of logbooks a try. He noted that there are ways to check accuracy in reporting.

With regard to paying for the improvements to the data collection system, one member announced his efforts to have the funds collected from the HMS permit out of the General Fund and to NMFS' HMS Division to fund a tagging system. Another member added that a permit system would be the most cost effective way to fund the data collection program and that the fishing community has lost confidence with the MRFSS. Finally, there was a discussion on the issue of federal jurisdiction and state rights with regard to an HMS permit.

XI. Advisory Committee Business

Funding/Budget. Dr. Graves explained to the AC that there is a 3-year funding cycle for the AC, at the end of which any carryover from the AC grant is returned to the General Fund. Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 was the first year of the funding cycle, however, during 2003 the funding was changed from a FY to a Calendar Year (CY), and the 2003 funds had to cover 15 months instead of 12 months. This meant that the 2003 budget covered two ICCAT meetings. As a result, there was a \$15,000 overage in the 2003 budget that was carried over to 2004. For 2004, the \$150,000 grant for the year minus the \$15,000 overage, leaves a \$135,000 budget. Dr. Graves has agreed to put \$35,000 of that into reserve to cover some of the costs of the special events at the 2004 Annual ICCAT meeting in New Orleans. He noted that there would likely be no regional meetings this year, although he reiterated that he would be willing to make a presentation to any large group of people requesting it. He added that there could be an overage of about \$5,000 from 2004 to 2005, but that this should not be a problem.

2004 AC Schedule. Dr. Graves briefly reviewed the fall schedule, noting that there would be two fall meetings. At the first meeting, the AC will review draft proposals and discuss positions on non-species issues. At the second meeting, the AC will review the outcomes from the SCRS meeting and the trilateral and quadrilateral meetings, finalize discussions on positions, and set priorities for the annual meeting.

ICCAT 2004 Steering Committee. Dr. Graves noted that the current budget for the New Orleans meeting shows a shortfall of up to \$100,000. This budget is for hosting the ICCAT meeting and does not include the special events. Originally, the United States was considering hosting 3 events, but after talking to the Commission Chairman, it was decided to have only 2 events. The first event would be Sunday night, when the delegates arrive, and would be held at the Fairmont Hotel, the venue for the ICCAT meeting. The second would be on Tuesday night and would include a mini-Mardi Gras parade and a dinner aboard a riverboat. The estimated total cost of the two events is \$70,000. With the \$35,000 IAC contribution, that leaves \$35,000 that the two private sector Commissioners agreed to endeavor to raise between themselves from their constituents.

The Recreational Commissioner expressed an interest in the Sunday night reception as an opportunity to showcase the US recreational fishing industry. He noted that other ICCAT members do not have an accurate view of this industry. He also felt that this as an opportunity to showcase the US commercial industry. Another member agreed and felt that an arrangement that is comfortable for both industries could be made.

A member noted that the other ICCAT members are also unaware of our domestic fishery management organization, including the role of the Councils. He suggested that presentations from the Commissions, Councils, and NOAA Fisheries be included at the meeting or the special events. It was agreed that NMFS would have an information table at the conference.

Other Issues. Dr. Graves announced that this year was the last year of a two-year AC appointment cycle, and that an announcement requesting nominations for AC members for the 2005-2006 session would be circulated through the Federal Register in the late summer. He noted that there were a number of absentees at this meeting and previous AC meetings and urged constituents to find more active participants where necessary.

One member noted that there are two meetings in the two-year cycle that are closed to the public, including the technical advisors. He also pointed out that there is a crisis in the balance of representation on the AC, and one of the three constituencies was not present on this last day of the meeting. He expressed that the environmental constituency was duly missed.

Another member noted that the commercial sector was missing three AC members and one technical advisor and emphasized the importance of identifying members and technical advisors for the next AC that will be involved in the meetings. When asked what needed to occur to replace absentee members in the interim, the response from the Chair was to have those members resign. One Commercial member noted that the timing of the current meeting was difficult because the seafood show was held concurrently and a number of members were attending that instead. He noted that next year's spring meeting should not be held from March 13-15 to avoid the same conflict.

The Recreational Commissioner noted that it was important to identify new individuals to serve on the AC to replace the absentee members. It is good to get different perspectives and points of view, but noted that new members sometimes lose interest in the process early. Another member suggested moving technical advisors who have consistently attended meetings and added to the discussions to be AC members, as they have shown their dedication.

When asked what the limit was for the size of the US delegation to an annual ICCAT meeting, Dr. Graves responded that it was up to the Head of Delegation. He noted that the AC would fund six members and one extra to the ICCAT meeting. When it was suggested that interested parties apply for observer status if they want to attend the meeting, it was further explained that members not on the official delegation but attending the meeting could have access to the US delegation room, but not the ICCAT meeting. Conversely, observers can have access to the ICCAT meeting, but not the US delegation meeting. It was also noted that the cost of observer status at an ICCAT meeting is 500 Euros.

XIII. Report of SWG Discussions

On the afternoon of March 16, each of the SWGs met separately in closed session to develop research and management recommendations for consideration by the Advisory Committee as a whole. Once agreed, these recommendations will be transmitted to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries and the U.S. Commissioners to ICCAT. The final reports of these Working Groups are attached. Attachment 1 is the Billfish Working Group Report. Attachment 2 is the BAYS Tunas Working Group Report. Attachment 3 is the Swordfish Working Group Report. Attachment 4 is the Bluefin Tuna Working Group Report.

BAYS Tunas. John Mark Dean presented the recommendations from the BAYS tunas working group. One member noted that it is difficult to review and consider the recommendations without a copy of the report, but asked why the working group did not comment on the issue of an ICCAT measure prohibiting

the sale of recreationally caught fish and reminded the AC that the US domestic regulations already prohibit such activity. He felt that the EC was responding to a US concern that they have not taken steps to deal with their recreational fishery and the United States should support those efforts. Another member disagreed and felt that the international sector should not get involved in domestic regulations. He stated that this was an issue of a cultural nuance. A Commissioner reminded the AC that it was other ICCAT members that blocked the adoption of this measure and that the United States had only objected to a statement in the chapeau regarding recreational fisheries interfering with commercial fisheries. A committee member suggested NMFS prepare a two paragraph review of the issue, addressing the potential problems.

Dr. Dean replied that the BAYS working group had considered the EC proposal, but did not comment on it in the report. The group felt that this issue was adequately addressed domestically by the HMS regulations and he felt the issues of controlling catches of small fish in the Gulf of Guinea and improving the status of the yellowfin and skipjack stocks were more important. He requested that the issue of compliance be included on the AC agenda in the fall.

Billfish. Bobbi Walker presented the recommendations from the Billfish working group. A member noted that the working group addressed data collection, both as international and domestic issues. Another member reminded the AC of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) review scheduled for white marlin in 2007. An AC member mentioned the problem with landings of blue marlin in Puerto Rico and stated that there are no reports on who is landing these fish. He wants to be assured that the commercial sector will not be implicated in this situation.

Another member expressed concern that the AC not enter into a discussion on the illegal sale of fish. Everyone agrees that this is wrong and that the issue goes beyond HMS species. He reminded the group, though, that the purchase of recreationally caught fish is also illegal and that fish dealers have a role in this problem and that reputable dealers should require to see a fishing license when purchasing fish. An AC member suggested that a special session be held to discuss the data collection issue. He reminded the group to be careful about mixing up landings and catch.

One member expressed support of developing a census data collection method and asked whether data may be submitted to ICCAT so that one set of data is for scientific use and another for compliance. In response, Ms. Warner-Kramer concurred that this is done at ICCAT. Dr. Lent added although reporting separate data has been done in the past, but the United States does not prefer it to be done this way. She felt that everyone, including the AC, should consider it a goal of the United States and other ICCAT members to be transparent in their data reporting.

It was generally agreed that the numbers reported for science need to be the best available. The specifics on the blue marlin landings in Puerto Rico were also discussed. The Chair told the Committee that NMFS is sending Dr. Hogarth and enforcement officers to Puerto Rico to investigate the marlin issue. One member added that the problem of counting fish, whether it be not counting landed fish or counting fish that were never landed, is ongoing and needs to be dealt with.

Dr. Scott responded that the data issues go beyond billfish and that the US National Report clearly indicates that we are aware of holes in reporting, and we will update landings estimates when more information is available. The question, he suggested, is how to react to imperfect information to ensure that the United States does not exceed quotas.

Bluefin Tuna. Dr. David Secor presented the recommendations from the bluefin tuna working group. Following his presentation, one member reiterated his advice to the US scientists attending the Intersessional to present a strong and clear case that the exchange of fish from west to east is extensive

and gives the United States a stake in the eastern management. He acknowledged that moving the management boundary eastward would be a difficult position to negotiate and that other members, including Japan and the EC, have indicated that they do not support such a change. Another member noted that moving the line eastward would bring new members, namely Iceland, into the western, conservation-minded side, instead of having them fish under the eastern standard. It was acknowledged that the United States would not have much support from other members on this position.

A member of the working group expressed their strong belief that NMFS needs to move to a census data collection method in the near term. Another member mentioned the EC's noncompliance with eastern bluefin tuna small fish measures and asked what the United States is going to do in response to this in 2004. One Commissioner responded that the facts on the small fish issue need to be gathered and discussed at the bilateral meeting with the EU this June.

Swordfish. Gail Johnson presented the recommendations from the swordfish working group. Following her presentation, a member noted that the swordfish working group was the only group that had all three constituencies represented and all aspects of the report were agreed to unanimously. One Commissioner commented that the 2010 call to include ecosystem-based management in fisheries management was interesting, but it was unclear how it would be done. There was a lengthy discussion on current ecosystem-based management efforts, including three pilot studies being funded by NMFS that do not involve highly migratory species.

Agenda

**2004 Spring Species Working Groups Meeting of the
Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT**

March 16-17, 2004 - Holiday Inn Hotel - Silver Spring, MD

Tuesday, March 16 (*Open to the Public Unless Otherwise Noted*)

John Graves, Advisory Committee Chairman, presiding

- 8:00 a.m. Registration
- 8:30 I. Opening of Meeting (*Graves except as noted*)
 - A. Welcome and Introductions (*Hogarth*)
 - B. Adoption of Agenda
 - C. Appointment of Conveners and Rapporteurs
- 8:45 II. 2003 ICCAT Meeting Results (*Graves*)
- 9:00 III. U.S. Implementation of ICCAT Decisions (*Rogers*)
- IV. NMFS Research and Monitoring Activities (*Rogers*)
- 9:30 V. 2004 SCRS Research Activities and U.S. Participation (*Scott*)
- 10:30 VI. Consultation Regarding ATCA Identification of Countries (*Carlsen*)
- 10:40 VII. Commission Update (*Carlsen*)
- 11:30 VIII. Other Open Session Business
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH

Tuesday Afternoon Session (*Closed to the Public*)

- 1:00 IX. Species Working Group Meetings
- 4:30 X. Review of 2004 Schedule and Issues (*Hogarth*)

Wednesday, March 17 (*Open to the public unless otherwise noted*)

- 8:00 a.m. Registration
- 8:30 XI. SWG meetings (Finalization of reports) (*Closed to the Public*)
- 9:15 XII. Advisory Committee Business (*Graves*)
 - A. Funding/Budget
 - B. 2004 AC Schedule
 - C. ICCAT 2004 Steering Committee
 - D. Other Issues
- 10:30 XIII. Report of SWG Discussions (*Conveners*)
 - BAYS Tunas
 - Billfish
 - Swordfish
 - Bluefin Tuna
- 12:30 p.m. Adjournment

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

U.S. Commissioners to ICCAT

Michael Genovese	Interim Commercial Commissioner
Bill Hogarth	Government Commissioner
Bob Hayes	Recreational Commissioner

Advisory Committee Members

Nelson Beideman	Blue Water Fishermen's Association
Ray Bogan	Bogan and Bogan
John Mark Dean	South Atlantic FMC
Jack Devnew	The Flagship Group
Jim Donofrio	Recreational Fishing Alliance
Willie Etheridge	Etheridge Seafood
John Graves	VA Institute of Marine Science
Gail Johnson	F/V Seneca
Shana Miller	Environmental
Ellen Peel	The Billfish Foundation
Eugenio Pineiro	Caribbean FMC
Rich Ruais	East Coast Tuna Association
David Secor	University of Maryland
Bobbie Walker	Gulf of Mexico FMC
Peter Weiss	General Category Tuna Association

Committee Members not in Attendance:

<i>David Borden</i>	<i>New England FMC</i>
<i>Peter Foley</i>	<i>L. Boone</i>
<i>Liz Lauck</i>	<i>Wildlife Conservation Society</i>
<i>Bob Lucas</i>	<i>Attorney at law</i>
<i>Russell Nelson</i>	<i>Nelson Consulting</i>
<i>Bob Pride</i>	<i>Mid-Atlantic FMC</i>
<i>Randi Parks Thomas</i>	<i>U.S. Tuna Foundation</i>
<i>Steve Weiner</i>	
<i>David Wilmot</i>	<i>Ocean Wildlife Campaign</i>

Technical Advisors

Pamela Basco	
Phil Goodyear	Consultant
John Larson	
Molly Lutcavage	New England Aquarium
Bob McAuliffe	McAuliffe Fishing, Inc.
Don Nehls	Lindgren-Pittman, Inc.
Greg Skomal	Mass. Division of Marine Fisheries
Dick Stone	Consultant
Bob Zales II	Panama City Boatmen Association

Technical Advisors not in Attendance*Andrew Baler**James Budi**Bob Cowen**Ron Hamlin**Tim Hobbs**Putnam MacLean**Ernie Panacek**Predator Packouts**Ocean Wildlife Campaign**Bright Eye Fishing Corp.**Viking Village, Inc.*Government Personnel

Erika Carlsen

Michael Clark

Joe DesFosse

Stewart Harris

Rachel Husted

Rebecca Lent

Emily Lindow

Mariam McCall

Brad McHale

Caroline Park

Joseph Powers

Christopher Rogers

Jerry Scott

Linda Shaw

Rebecca Shuford

Michael Sissenwine

Dianne Stephane

Dean Swanson

Deirdre Warner-Kramer

Dorothy Zbicz

NMFS International Fisheries

NMFS HMS Division

NMFS HMS Division

Congressional Affairs

NMFS International Fisheries

NMFS, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs

NOAA

NOAA GCF

NMFS HMS Division

NOAA GCF

NMFS/SEFSC

NMFS HMS Division, Chief

NMFS/SEFSC

NMFS International Fisheries

NMFS International Fisheries

NMFS, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Scientific Programs

NMFS HMS Division

NMFS International Fisheries

Department of State

Department of State

Other Attendees

Sally Campen

Jennifer Smith

Japan Fisheries Association

Office of Advocacy, SBA

ATTACHMENT 1

**Report of the Billfish Working Group
Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2004 Species Working Group Workshop**

Holiday Inn, Silver Spring, MD
March 16-17, 2004

*Bobbi Walker, Convener
Dianne Stephan, Rapporteur*

The Billfish Working Group discussed potential future actions for ICCAT regarding billfish research, management, and the issue of sale of recreational catch.

A. Research Recommendations

Ongoing or recently completed research studies relevant to the six priority areas identified in 2003 were discussed by researchers John Graves and Phil Goodyear. Each of the six priority research areas was reaffirmed, without identification of priorities among the six. These research priorities are:

1. Continue efforts to describe the post-release survival of white marlin and blue marlin caught by commercial longline and recreational fishing gear.
2. Identify habitat preferences of white marlin and blue marlin.
3. Continue evaluation and testing of the assumptions inherent in the habitat-based standardization model.
4. Develop a more generalized surplus production model that would accommodate the effect of age structure with aitch and effort data.
5. Continue research into methodologies to minimize billfish encounters and mortality in each targeted fishery that catches billfish.
6. Continue work identifying basic billfish biological parameters.

The need for basic biological information was emphasized by a number of work group members. The work group was encouraged by findings regarding increased post-release survival of marlin caught with circle hooks. Some members suggested that NMFS should dedicate more funding to support future billfish research.

Historical data from Japanese longline catches is being studied by Phil Goodyear for incorporation into future stock assessments. However, this and additional information that could be very valuable will not be ready for the scheduled 2005 stock assessment. As a result, the working group added a 7th research recommendation:

- 7) Postpone the ICCAT stock assessment scheduled for 2005 until 2006.

B. Management Recommendations

The methodology used for estimation of recreational billfish catch was discussed, along with U.S. implementation of the 250 catch limit for white and blue marlin and potential implications for ICCAT compliance. A work group member noted that the 250 catch limit was based upon the previous method of estimating recreational marlin catch, and the work group noted that this recommendation expires in 2005. The work group discussed landings of marlin in Puerto Rico in the context of IUU fisheries.

The work group also discussed the potential of proposing an ICCAT recommendation prohibiting sale of recreationally caught fish, and its potential implications for the U.S., European Union and developing nations.

The work group did not propose any new recommendations, and continued to support the recommendations identified in 2003 as follows:

- 1) Promote compliance with existing ICCAT management measures, especially those concerning observer coverage and data reporting requirements relevant to catch reductions.
- 2) Task the SCRS to undertake analyses of billfish releases by time, area, and by country or entity, including information on the condition of the fish at time of haulback.

Work Group Members:

Robert Cowen (absent)
 Jack Devnew
 Phil Goodyear (technical advisor)
 John Graves
 Ron Hamlin (absent)
 Bob Lucas (absent)
 Don Nehls (temporary switch to bluefin tuna SWG)
 Russ Nelson (absent)
 Ellen Peel
 Bobbi Walker - Convener

Other Attendees:

Nelson Beideman
 Erika Carlsen
 Mike Genovese
 Bob Hayes
 Bill Hogarth
 Emily Lindow
 Chris Rogers
 Gerry Scott
 Deirdre Warner-Kramer
 Dianne Stephan

ATTACHMENT 2

**Report of the Bigeye, Albacore, Yellowfin, and Skipjack (BAYS)
Tunas Working Group**

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2004 Species Working Group Workshop

Holiday Inn, Silver Spring, MD
March 16-17, 2004

*John Mark Dean, Convener
Rebecca Shuford, Rapporteur*

I. Recommendations for BAYS TunasA. Data

MRFSS and LPS are fatally flawed and have failed. It is time to acknowledge that they cannot be further modified or adapted for the current needs of fishery management. The BAYS SWG recommends as its highest priority the development of HMS landings data that meets high standards for accuracy and precision. Such a program will: 1) provide the US with the best possible data for submission to ICCAT; 2) give the user groups confidence in the data; 3) give the management agencies credibility with their constituents for management decisions that utilize the data; 4) be administered at the state level to be cost effective.

The BAYS Working Group remains convinced that recreational and commercial data in U.S. BAYS fisheries are seriously under-reported. This view is strengthened based on the report by Andy Loftus and Dick Stone in which they report the findings of their study “Evaluating Potential Bias in the Large Pelagic Survey for the BAYS Atlantic Tuna Fishery”. The focus of the study, which was commissioned by the National Marine Fisheries Service in response to continuing Committee concerns, was on recreational HMS tuna catches.

Regarding the collection of BAYS data, current estimation methods using MRFSS and LPS data are ineffective and unacceptable. Attempts to modify them have not proven to solve the problem of providing accurate BAYS landings estimates. The Working Group recommends that the mechanism(s) currently in place to report and collect data be changed to a state-based process, analogous to commercial trip ticket reporting. Federal funding should be allocated to the states to develop and implement independent programs based on a common template (see ACCSP module) and report progress at the Spring 2005 SWG meeting. With such a change in methodology, a retrospective analysis using the proposed new system is necessary. Several states have existing long-term recreational and commercial data sets, documented in the Loftus and Stone report that would make possible this essential multi-year retrospective analysis. The special needs of the Caribbean area relative to data collection on BAYS tunas were recognized by the Working Group. Collection of data in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands has made significant progress.

NMFS should continue to report recreational BAYS landings as provisional to SCRS, and these data should not be used for future allocation purposes. Efforts should be made by NMFS to help states develop the new reporting program and submit revised catch data for all BAYS in future ICCAT national reports.

Finally, in previous reports the BAYS SWG has recommended that ICCAT begin collecting TASK I data for dolphin and wahoo. However, before the U.S. calls upon other ICCAT Parties to provide such TASK I data we must be confident that our landings estimates are accurate.

B. Research

The research activities report that was presented did not address our need for information on the content and activity level of the projects. It was clear from the comments in the full committee that numerous projects that are relevant and appropriate were not included. If we do not know what research is underway, and when it will be completed, we cannot provide the necessary advice to the commissioners.

Next year's report should be presented, possibly in a spread sheet format that will contain the following information:

It should include all internal and external NOAA research on HMS species including but not limited to all S-K and Marfin projects. NGOs should be interviewed for the projects they are supporting. State agencies and state Sea Grant projects should be included as well as cooperative international projects. The report should include the title of the project, the PI and co-PIs, their level of effort in the project (months of effort per year) the level of funding, the time frame of the project, work products for projects that are beyond one year, and a web site address so we can get more information if necessary.

The Working Group requests that this report be updated annually and provided to the Advisory Committee at its spring meeting.

It appears that there is very little research directed at the research needs for the BAYS group that have been identified in previous reports. Considering the economic value of these fisheries, this record is not acceptable.

C. Monitoring and Compliance

The United States should pursue international rebuilding programs for all overfished BAYS tuna stocks, considering their domestic importance. Given the nature of the U.S. fisheries for BAYS tunas, the United States should only be responsible for a proportional share of the burden associated with rebuilding.

1) The Gulf of Guinea is the sole known spawning ground for bigeye tuna and the primary zone for yellowfin reproduction. It is a critical area for production of BAYS tuna and this area is where the vast majority of undersized bigeye and yellowfin tuna are harvested. The United States should support ICCAT efforts to investigate the Gulf of Guinea fisheries and develop effective measures to reduce the mortality of sublegal fish harvested in this area.

The United States should continue to support the use of international time/area closures in the Gulf of Guinea and, ultimately and as appropriate, propose an increase in the temporal and spatial coverage of the current closure. However, before a more long-term goal of expanding the time and area of closure is proposed, the issue of diminished effectiveness of the current mandate due to gross violation of the closure needs to be addressed and remedial action taken. The WG recommends identification of violating parties be made under ICCAT provision and appropriate actions taken to bring such countries to immediate compliance.

2) The lack of accurate data, due to poor estimation methods, of our current and historical northern albacore landings does not give us the ability to take regulatory action and in fact can hurt U.S. interests in both the short and long-term. There is no time in the past that we can point to that we have benefited from the U.S. taking a reckless lead in regulatory action against our fisheries as relates to species quota given the lack of quality data on our landings. Thus, the WG recommends that the U.S. not take regulatory action to restrict our northern albacore fishery.

3) In addition, the current ICCAT limit on the U.S. northern albacore fishery does not adequately cover U.S. needs and flexibility of the relevant provisions should be sought at the 2004 ICCAT meeting. Regarding allocation issues, the working group recommends that the allocation criteria adopted by ICCAT not be applied in a formulaic manner.

4) The United States should ensure that nations harvesting bigeye and yellowfin tunas comply with ICCAT's 1997 recommendation to improve compliance with minimum size recommendations and take steps to accelerate the implementation of existing measures to reduce the harvest of these tunas that are less than the minimum size, including implementing the provisions of the minimum size compliance measure.

5) The United States is encouraged to provide technical support/assistance to developing states to assist in the development of effective fishery management practices, including data collection and reporting, in order to facilitate the full participation of these countries in ICCAT and their adherence to ICCAT's conservation and management measures.

These are the priority issues for the BAYS SWG. This should not be interpreted as our exclusive concerns. Several other issues have been well developed in past reports of the Working Group and should be reviewed.

BAYS Tunas Working Group Members

Pamela Basco (technical advisor)
 Ray Bogan
 John Dean (Convener)
 Willie Etheridge
 John Larson (Technical Advisor)
 Liz Lauck (absent)
 Bob McAuliffe (Technical Advisor)
 Randi Thomas (absent)
 Greg Skomal (Technical Advisor)
 Geno Pinero

Other Attendees

Rebecca Shuford (NMFS Rapporteur)
 Jim Donofrio
 Mike Genovese
 Bob Hayes

ATTACHMENT 3

Report of the Swordfish Working Group

2004 Species Working Group Workshop

Holiday Inn, Silver Spring, MD
March 16-17, 2004

Gail Johnson, Convener
Michael Clark, Rapporteur

A. Research & Monitoring Recommendations

1. **U.S. Reporting.** With the new permitting and reporting requirements, NMFS should provide an estimate of the universe of HMS anglers and the landings of recreationally caught swordfish. Currently, recreational anglers participating in HMS fisheries within state waters may not be required to have federal permits. A condition of an HMS permit must be requiring compliance regardless of where the boat fishes. NMFS needs to coordinate with state marine divisions to identify and fully describe all HMS angling activities. When new permitting and reporting requirements are implemented, estimates of recreational HMS harvest will be more complete.
2. **Observer Coverage.** NMFS should continue to achieve up to 8% observer coverage on pelagic longline vessels. Additionally, during an interim period, NMFS should request comparable voluntary observer coverage on recreational HMS anglers within swordfish nursery closed areas. The ultimate goal of comparable observer coverage on all HMS fisheries should be a priority of NMFS.
3. **International Observer Coverage.** The working group recommends that NMFS investigate ways to develop incentives for observer coverage across a wider range of HMS fisheries; more reliable information is more saleable to the ICCAT community. ICCAT should explore creative funding sources to assist those countries lacking observer coverage to achieve compliance, i.e., non-governmental organizations or foundations.
4. **Stock Structure.** NMFS research on genetic sampling to determine north/south Atlantic stock boundaries is ongoing; a symposium on these issues is likely to take place in 2005, and the United States should continue pursuing this.
5. **Bycatch Mortality.** The working group appreciates the opportunistic work that the SE Center and others have completed and continues to support the development of research programs to determine survival rates of released swordfish from all gear types using pop-up tags or other appropriate methodology. We continue to encourage research focused on survival rates of HMS species from all gear types.
6. **Gear Modification Research.** The working group recommends continuing and accelerating research for the development of additional gear modifications to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality, with emphasis on methods that are exportable.
7. **Vessel Tracking.** The United States should encourage countries to comply with the existing ICCAT VMS recommendation. Furthermore, all U.S. flagged vessels fishing outside the U.S. EEZ for HMS should be required to use VMS units.

8. **Time/Area Closures.** The working group believes international time/area closures should be aggressively pursued to protect small swordfish.
9. **Data Needs.** The US should conduct the surveys necessary to continue the young of the year index to monitor juvenile swordfish abundance, which was compromised by the 1991 implementation of the minimum size.

B. Conservation and Management Recommendations

1. **Monitoring Plan.** Currently, ICCAT lacks comprehensive data regarding stock and age structure. We strongly recommend efforts to monitor and evaluate the condition of the stock to ensure that the integrity of the swordfish rebuilt stock is maintained. If necessary, NMFS should pursue an ICCAT recommendation that the US conduct a swordfish juvenile abundance index.
2. **Allocation.** The United States should aggressively defend its allocated shares for swordfish and all species. NMFS should take the necessary steps to revitalize the U.S. pelagic longline fleet's ability to utilize the ICCAT swordfish quota.
3. **Reduce Undersized Swordfish Mortality.** The United States should work with other countries to identify areas of high catch of undersized swordfish, marlin and other highly migratory species. The working group also encourages the transfer of positive findings from longline gear modification research to foreign fleets.
4. **Combating IUU.** The United States must implement ICCAT's IUU measures as quickly as possible. The US should continue to pursue additional, more effective strategies that support multi-lateral authority to implement relevant unilateral measures including trade restrictive measures against Parties that do not comply with ICCAT management measures.

C. Other Issues

1. Import Prohibitions on Undersized Swordfish

- a. Prior to pursuing the ICCAT alternative minimum size that would allow US fishermen to land undersize swordfish caught that can't be returned to the sea alive outside the closed areas, we recommend that NMFS ask the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to determine if this would compromise current import prohibitions on undersized swordfish.
 - i. For any future consideration of this concept, measures to prevent directed fishing on undersized fish must be developed. The industry has not resolved a critical question concerning whether the Second Harvest concept could be made workable and/or would effectively prevent any incentive to direct fishing effort on undersized swordfish.
 - ii. We recommend that NMFS pursue cooperative research to modify the time area closures to better identify areas for juvenile protection while still allowing viable PLL that can utilize the United States ICCAT quota. Our research recommendations could include:
 - Surveys of the offshore boundary from the "axis of the Gulf Stream" (printed on NOAA chart #411) from 27 30 N. latitude through the 34 00 N. latitude offshore boundary of the current swordfish nursery closed areas.

- The existing time of the Charleston Bump swordfish nursery area should be scientifically reviewed to determine if it effectively accomplishes the intended protection of undersized swordfish in the most comprehensive time frame.
- The DeSoto Canyon swordfish nursery ground closure should be scientifically evaluated to ensure that the closure is necessary and effectively protects any over-fished HMS.
 - a. Is this closure necessary? Is it scientifically justified?
 - b. If this area is not proposed for reopening, then the following should be considered, including: reopening the offshore boundary outside of 350 fathom depth contours from 26 00N to 29 00N.

2. Deferred Recommendation 7.1 (attached)

The working group supports this resolution as written.

3. Deferred Recommendation 7.2 (attached)

The recommendation needs to be revised to account for the need for recreational and commercial fisheries to coexist and not undermine the sustainable exploitation of the stocks. The working group agrees with the operational content of this recommendation.

4. Enforcement

NMFS should take all necessary actions to stop illegal sales of swordfish. Enforcement should make examples of all fishermen, fish dealers, and restaurateurs.

5. UNGA Resolution.

The ICCAT Secretariat should prepare a report describing the conservation actions that it has implemented since its inception, updating the United Nations and other relevant entities with regard to its progressive, state of the art management mandates for multilateral natural resource management

6. SEFSC Report.

The working group appreciates the efforts of the SEFSC in preparing reports for the IAC and request they continue to work with NMFS staff on data needs related to:

- Status of time/area closures and impacts on stocks/fishery
- Status and effectiveness of minimum size compliance
- Pertinent research results from NMFS and academic science
- Bycatch estimates [from all US swordfish fisheries]

Swordfish Working Group Members

Nelson Beideman
 Dave Borden (absent)
 Peter Foley (absent)
 Gail Johnson (Convener)
 Putnam MacLean (technical advisor – absent)
 Shana Miller
 Ernie Panacek (technical advisor – absent)
 Bob Pride
 Bob Zales (technical advisor)

Other Attendees

Mike Clark (NMFS - Rapporteur)
 Mike Genovese (Acting Commercial ICCAT Commissioner)
 Gerry Scott (SEFSC)
 Deirdre Warner-Kramer (Dept. of State)

ATTACHMENT 4

Report of the Bluefin Tuna Working Group

Advisory Committee to the U.S. Section to ICCAT
2004 Species Working Group Workshop

Holiday Inn, Silver Spring, MD
March 16-17, 2004

David Secor, Convener
Brad McHale, Rapporteur

A. Recommendations for 2004 ICCAT Bluefin Tuna Intersessional in Marseille, France

1. **Expanded range of western Atlantic stock.** The Working Group recommends that US Representatives to the ICCAT Working Group to Develop Integrated and Coordinated Bluefin Tuna Management Strategies focus on science and management issues in the central North Atlantic. We urge expansion of the current western Atlantic 45 W. longitude division line to include Boxes 3 and 4 in the six-box model. New and compelling scientific evidence has demonstrated substantial rates of migration of western Atlantic bluefin tuna into regions of the central North Atlantic, east of the current stock boundary. Because of this migration, western Atlantic bluefin tuna are exposed to exploitation rates that may exceed those that would be recommended for western population rebuilding. From the 2001 ICCAT Mixing Report, the Working Group notes that, “the catch of western-origin fish in the east Atlantic management area generates a higher proportion of the fishing mortality rate on the western-origin fish than is the case for the converse scenario.” On this basis we believe that ICCAT should take a precautionary approach and adjust the stock boundaries in the north Atlantic to address current understanding.
2. **Six box model.** The six-box model, while an intriguing and potentially efficient means to utilize mixing rate data within future assessments, remains too preliminary to pursue at the Intersessional meeting. There are further developments required in the use of natural markers to determine population origin, electronic tags to support rates of mixing, and operational models to forecast scenarios of mixing and dispersal rates before pursuing this model. Further, the committee believed that there are potentially serious and unforeseen management consequences in moving towards six versus two regional assessment/management units.
3. **Scientific input.** The Group recommends that the Intersessional meeting include a limited and focused scientific program by NMFS and independent scientists on exchange between the western and the central north Atlantic. Presentations should include
 - Retrospective landings and CPUE analysis in the North Atlantic
 - Electronic tag recoveries and records in the North Atlantic
 - Conventional tag records in the North Atlantic
 - Progress on natural markers
 - Review of the premise that mixed stock fisheries disproportionately affect western-origin bluefin tuna.

B. Research Recommendations

1. **Stock Structure Research.** The Working Group recommends continued support by NMFS and ICCAT for ongoing efforts to develop natural tags of population origin using genetics and otolith microconstituents. We encourage the Advisory Committee to assist in identifying opportunities for collecting young-of-the-year and 1-year bluefin tuna, which are critical to this application. Contact persons are D. Secor (410-326-7421; secor@cbl.umces.edu) and J. Graves (graves@vims.edu).
2. **Central Atlantic Research.** Questions remain on the biological and demographic determinants of aggregation by adult bluefin tuna in the central Atlantic. The Working Group requests that NMFS scientists work with other scientists and the U.S. longline fleet to collect, distribute, and analyze biological samples in order to resolve outstanding questions on the reproductive biology, spatial distribution, size and age structure, and population origin of adults captured in this region.
3. **Tagging Efforts.** The Working Group strongly recommends continued NMFS and international research support for conventional and electronic tagging to identify migration patterns, environmental associations, and exchange rates across the Atlantic Ocean. We ask NMFS to work with ICCAT partners to support international coordination on the development and deployment of electronic tags in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. We also urge continued support of improved tags, resolution of technical problems of data reception, tag retention, and tag recovery.
4. **Gulf of Mexico Spawning Stock Research.** Due to uncertainty in the status of the Gulf of Mexico spawning stock, the Working Group suggests research, monitoring, and further analysis of catch data to evaluate trends in abundance, demographic attributes, reproductive condition, and spawning potential of adult bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico. Further, there is increased concern that the larval index is not reflective of changes in spawning potential occurring in the Western population. NMFS should work with other agencies to support research on oceanographic conditions underlying larval distributions. Beyond encouraging more research on these topics, we also recommend that SCRS develop a comprehensive observer program to monitor bluefin tuna bycatch in U.S. and Mexican pelagic longline fisheries. In recognition of Mexico's new quota for bluefin tuna caught as bycatch in their yellowfin tuna fishery, we request that the U.S. Delegation seek a recommendation that urges Mexican participation in research and monitoring, particularly with the use of at-sea observers.
5. **Technical Interactions.** The Working Group notes the increased use of pelagic longline time area closures in management for bluefin tuna and requests that research on gear modifications (e.g., circle hooks and hook strength, wire diameter) be investigated as an alternate approach to reduce bycatch of bluefin tuna.
6. **Improved assessment of juvenile bluefin tuna.** There is a continued gap in our knowledge of juvenile distribution, abundance and ecology in the western Atlantic. The Working Group recommends pursuit of fishery independent surveys (e.g., aerial surveys), mark-recapture studies using convention tags, electronic tagging studies, environmental analyses, and other approaches.

C. Management Recommendations

1. **Recreational category statistic.** Revisions of the NMFS 2002 Recreational Category Catch statistic (due to a change in procedure) will substantially modify levels originally estimated, and could cause a U.S. overage in this category. The Working Group strongly recommends continued and aggressive movement by NMFS away from survey-based methods towards census-based methods. In the short-term the Working Group recommends that for ICCAT reporting, 2002 and 2003 Recreational Catch

should be presented as provisional (e.g., with a footnote). A majority of the Working Group also felt that US Recreational Category statistics should be based exclusively upon census data, and that these should be reported for 2002, 2003 and in future years. NMFS scientists should undertake an external peer review of the current census-based methods, which involves state and independent scientists.

2. **Achieve sustainable levels of fishing in East Atlantic.** The Working Group believes that the Commissioners should make it a priority objective to achieve substantial reductions in the Eastern Atlantic TAC at the 2004 meeting in New Orleans. There is increasing evidence of mixing across the 45-degree stock boundary, and we note that excessive harvest of western-origin fish in the eastern Atlantic will curtail recovery of the western stock. We are seriously concerned about the recommendation establishing a 4-year TAC program allowing annual catches of at least 6,000 mt above the scientific recommendation. The Working Group is also concerned that a primary justification for the excessive TAC is an SCRS finding that catches beyond 50,000 mt might be sustainable if a large reduction in mortality on small fish is achieved. The Group notes that the recommendation is speculative and explicitly linked to a substantial, and to date undocumented reduction in the catch and landing of fish below 6.4 kg (the ICCAT minimum size since 1974).
3. **Monitoring of tuna farming/NEI catch.** The Working Group is not confident that the 2003 ICCAT recommendation on tracking bluefin tuna farming activities is adequate to close potential loopholes for countries to obscure exceeded quotas of wild fish. The Working Group perceives the need for much more detailed accounting processes, which include technology-based monitoring as the fish are transferred from tow cages to holding pens. The U.S. should work with other states for (1) reliable technology-based, verifiable methods to track the amount of harvest going into the farms; and (2) An accurate, quantitative method of assessing weight gain due to growth in captivity, and a process for reconciling farm production with quota categories.
4. **Development of Operational Models for Management.** The Working Group endorses a proposal by NMFS scientists to develop an "Operational Assessment Model" that allows managers and interested parties within SCRS to incorporate biological realism into assessments and to make better-informed policy decisions. The Group expects that this effort will build upon, among other considerations; the alternative stock structures examined during the 2001 ICCAT Mixing Workshop and the resultant report. Because of the diverse issues entailed in the development and application of these models, participation in its development should include scientific experts, managers, and user groups.
5. **Allocation of Small Bluefin in the West Atlantic.** We reiterate our request to NMFS from past years to evaluate possible ways to increase the 8% cap by shifting mortality from larger school bluefin to smaller bluefin tuna in a manner that is resource-neutral. Recognizing that concern must be given to maintaining levels of juvenile mortality at acceptable levels, the U.S. Delegation should consider seeking an increase in the cap as part of any renegotiation of the 20-year rebuilding program.

Bluefin Tuna Working Group Members

Jim Budi (Technical Advisor, absent)
 Jim Donofrio (absent)
 Ray Bogan (Temporary move from BAYS)
 Molly Lutcavage (Technical Advisor)
 Shana Miller (Temporary move from SWORDFISH)
 Don Nehls (Temporary move from BILLFISH)
 Rich Ruais
 David Secor (Convener)

Dick Stone (Technical Advisor)
Steve Weiner (absent)
Peter Weiss (absent)
Dave Wilmot (absent)

Bluefin Tuna Working Group Attendees

Erika Carlsen
Mike Genovese (Commissioner)
Chris Rogers
Deirdre Warner-Kramer

Bluefin Tuna Working Group Attendance Notes:

Only two Committee Members (Ruais and Secor) of seven attending
Only two Technical Advisors (Lutcavage and Stone) of four attending